

Cincinnati Ordination Kavanah
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Unexpectedly, a flame flickers. Curious, Moses turns aside to look, really look.

וְהִנֵּה הַסִּנֵּה בֵּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינּוּ אֹכֵל: (Ex 3:2)

Somehow, the bush burns, but remains unconsumed. Somehow, God calls to him:

מִשָּׂה מִשָּׂה. And Moses replies: הִנְנִי — “Here I am” (Ex 3:4).

With one word, a humble shepherd turns into a divinely appointed leader, charged with liberating an oppressed people and guiding them to the Promised Land.

Awed by what it means to be called to serve God and God’s people, Moses wonders:

מִי אֲנִי — Who am I to accept such a daunting mission? (Ex 3:11). God reassures him:

אֲהִיָּה עִמָּךְ — “I will be with you” every step of the way. (Ex 3:12).

Nonetheless, before he sets off — staff in hand — Moses asks: “When I come to the Israelites and say to them: ‘The God of your ancestors sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is God’s name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Ex 3:13). God answers: אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה (Ex 3:14).

How should we understand this beguiling response? Does God simply state: “I Am Who I Am”? Or does this mean: “I Will Be Who I Will Be” — teaching us that even our Rock and Redeemer changes and evolves, ever responsive to what the universe needs and to what we, human beings manage to do on this earth.

One commentator posits that the name signals limitless potential: “I can be and can do anything” (Propp). Another asserts that “the name of Israel’s God indicates an open and fluid identity” (Meyers, 59). The God who separated light from darkness and created every individual in the divine image — that same God becomes manifest in the Exodus, on Mount Sinai, in every single act of healing and *chesed*.

Just as on that holy ground long ago, so, too, here on this אֲדַמְת־קֹדֶשׁ (Ex 3:5). Our students will ascend this bima and stand before this holy ark, blessed to become the newest links in a chain of tradition — *shalshet hakabalah* — that stretches back to Moses and Joshua, to Miriam and Devorah, to countless generations of leaders and teachers of Torah.

In spite of their fears and insecurities, they, too, will head out, ready to shepherd the people > they are privileged to lead. They, too, will overcome obstacles and confront plenty of complaints as they work to fulfill their divinely-given potential by serving God and the Jewish people with integrity and authenticity, with reverence and humility.

Beloved students, with the ancient act of *s'michat yadayim*, the laying on of hands, we celebrate your becoming and your limitless potential. With the equally ancient words of *birkat kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing, you will become *k'lei kodesh*, adding the title “rabbi” to who you are now and who you will be as you grow into this life of service.

Now more than ever, people need you: to heal the שְׁבוּרֵי לֵב, the broken hearted (Ps 147:3); to teach and preach words that inspire people to do justice and treat one another with loving kindness — עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת הַחֵד — (Micah 6:8), to model what it means to speak truth and promote peace in our war-torn world — וְהָאֱמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אֶהְבֹּו (Zech 8:19).

Dear ordinands, as you follow through on your הִנְנִי moment, as you prepare to pledge yourselves to preserve the age-old covenant between God and Israel: קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ — be holy (Lev. 19:2), and be a blessing — וְהָיָה בְרָכָה (Gen. 12:2) — as we call you now to be ordained as rabbis in Israel.